

# **STATE INTERVENTIONS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

August 2002

Education Commission of the States  
700 Broadway  
Suite 1200  
Denver, CO 80203  
Phone: 303-299-3600  
Fax: 303-296-8332  
Web Address: [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	11
I. State Policies and Experiences with Interventions in Low-Performing Schools and School Districts	12
II. Research on the Impact of State Interventions on Low-Performing Schools And School Districts	19
III. Policy Recommendations and State Practitioner Advice	30
Appendix A: State Policies on Interventions in Low-Performing Schools and School Districts	38
Appendix B: State Narratives	49
Appendix C: Maps	68
Endnotes	70

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Washington Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission contracted with the Education Commission of the States (ECS) to produce this report. The report was written by researcher Carl Krueger, project manager Ravay Snow-Renner and program director Todd Ziebarth.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

State policymakers are increasingly focusing their attention on holding schools and school districts accountable for the performance of their students. One mechanism for ensuring such accountability is state intervention in low-performing schools and school districts. As states create and implement interventions, they seek clarity and understanding about what is known, and what is unknown, about them. This report attempts to provide such clarity and understanding.

### **State Policies and Experiences with Interventions in Low-Performing Schools and School Districts**

Based upon our research, 33 states have enacted policies that allow them to intervene in low-performing schools, while 30 states have enacted policies that allow them to intervene in low-performing school districts. These state policies cover a wide variety of interventions, including the following:

- Written warnings
- Technical assistance
- Additional funding
- Improvement plans by schools and school districts
- Improvement plans by another entity
- Placement on probation
- Removal of accreditation
- Withholding of funding
- Reconstitution
- Closure
- Reorganization
- Takeover.

Additionally, as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a federally imposed intervention policy requires school districts to allow students in certain low-performing schools to transfer to higher-performing schools in the school district. It also requires school districts to provide transportation for the transferring students to the higher-performing schools.

The development of state interventions in low-performing schools and school districts is a work in progress. To identify the policy challenges and opportunities for states developing their own interventions, we interviewed practitioners in 11 states with intervention experiences. These states are California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Texas and West Virginia.

Based upon our research:

- Each of the 11 states provides technical assistance to low-performing schools and/or school districts, although only some of them have enacted policies that require them to do so.
- Although the correlation between additional funding and increased achievement remains unclear, most of the 11 states believe there is some benefit to providing extra resources to troubled schools and school districts. In fact, many of them provide additional funding to low-performing schools and/or school districts, although only some of them have enacted policies that require them to do so.
- Each of the 11 states requires some form of improvement planning for low-performing schools and school districts, though the process for creating and implementing such plans varies.
- Each of the 11 states imposes sanctions on consistently low-performing schools and school districts. Such sanctions take many forms, including written warnings, probation, reconstitution, closure and takeover.

- Several of the 11 states provide written warnings to low-performing schools and/or school districts, although only some of them have enacted policies that require them to do so.
- Most of the 11 states place low-performing schools and/or school districts on probation.
- While most of the 11 states have enacted policies that allow them to reconstitute and/or close low-performing schools, only two (Maryland and New York) have taken such drastic steps.
- While several of the 11 states have enacted policies that allow them to take over low-performing schools, only one state (Maryland) has actually implemented this policy.
- Each of the 11 states has enacted policies that allow the state to take over a low-performing school district. There have been takeovers of school districts in 10 of the 11 states studied.

### **A Review of the Research on the Impact of State Interventions on Low-Performing Schools and School Districts**

The research about the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and school districts is just beginning to emerge, especially as these interventions impact school and district operations and student achievement. There are two reasons for the current shortage of definitive research on state interventions. The first reason is the relative infancy of most state interventions. The second reason is that many interventions are implemented in combination with other interventions, and therefore the research seldom examines the impact of a single intervention.

What little research does exist suggests that interventions shouldn't be expected to equally affect low-performing schools and school districts. One of the main reasons is that many schools or districts simply do not have the resources to implement changes. From the body of research about schools' and districts' abilities to implement reforms, often referred to as "local capacity," it is clear that local context plays a critical role in how well interventions take root in schools and districts.<sup>1</sup>

With these issues in mind, the following research findings are particularly relevant for states creating and refining interventions for low-performing schools and school districts:

- Kentucky and North Carolina provide two notable examples of state-provided technical assistance, and early research on these efforts shows a positive impact on student achievement.
- At this point, research does not show a clear impact on instruction or achievement from providing additional funding to low-performing schools and school districts, primarily for two reasons. First, such provision is relatively new, and the research is just beginning to emerge. Second, additional funding is generally provided in combination with other interventions, so it is impossible to link improvement directly and solely to the influence of additional funds. Still, early research on California's Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program shows promising results from providing additional funding to low-performing schools.
- The evidence linking mandated improvement plans for low-performing schools and school districts to increases in achievement is mixed. Some schools and school districts increase achievement, while others do not.
- Although little systematic evidence about the effects of reconstitutions on student achievement exists, anecdotal information suggests that reconstitutions may improve school order, stability and community involvement.
- There is limited research on the effects of takeovers of school districts. For the most part, they seem to be yielding more improvements in central-office financial and management practices than in classroom instructional practices. In some cases, takeovers have produced negative effects, including deficits and labor strife, and in most cases, the results in terms of student achievement have been mixed at best. The bottom line is that takeovers, for the most part, have yet to produce dramatic and consistent increases in student performance, as is necessary in many of the school districts that are taken over. Two promising takeovers are Logan County Public Schools in West Virginia and the Chicago Public Schools in Illinois.

- Because the federal government’s policy that requires school districts to allow students in low-performing schools to transfer to higher performing schools is new, there is no evidence about its impact. There is evidence, though, about the impact of other school choice policies. According to this research, the attempts of magnet schools, open enrollment programs and charter schools to provide disadvantaged students with greater educational options have produced mixed results. In addition, the impact of these policies on student achievement is undecided.
- Research does not provide strong conclusions about the effects of various state interventions on school and school district operations and on student achievement, largely because local responses to state interventions vary widely. Given the interplay of the different factors that contribute to this variation, researchers note that low-performing schools and school districts may have increased or reduced motivation to make changes, depending on their circumstances and ability to implement reforms.<sup>2</sup>

### **Policy Recommendations and State Practitioner Advice**

Based on our review of state policies and experiences as well as our review of the research, it appears that state interventions designed to assess and maximize existing abilities in low-performing schools and districts and to exert appropriate pressure for change may be the most likely to improve school and district operations and raise student achievement. Within the context of this observation, we offer the following recommendations:

- For the greatest impact on school and school district performance, states should target technical assistance to the individual needs of schools and school districts.
- States should develop a pool of technical-assistance providers for low-performing schools and districts, and a pool of supplemental-services providers for students in low-performing schools.
- State intervention policies for school and school district improvement plans should focus on improving student achievement, setting realistic improvement goals and requiring regular monitoring of school and district progress.



- If states create and implement takeover policies, they should ensure that takeover efforts focus on: establishing clear performance goals and measures, especially concerning academics; creating and implementing improvement strategies specific to the problems in the school or school district in question, particularly regarding improved instruction; defining the conditions under which the state will return control of the school or school district to local officials; and, when possible, partnering with local officials in the improvement effort.
- In creating and refining state intervention policies for low-performing schools and school districts, states should take into account the requirements and implications of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, particularly as they relate to providing assistance to low-performing schools.

As we gathered information for this report, a number of accountability officials from states with established intervention programs offered several recommendations, including the following:

- Technical assistance should be in-depth and targeted to the individual needs of schools and school districts. Allowing improvement teams or technical experts to assist a school on a daily basis – like in Kentucky and Connecticut – for a lengthy period of time allows the intervention process to grow and respond to a school’s unique needs.
- Professional development is an essential part of the intervention process. For example, establishing leadership academies for principals and mentoring programs for teachers may provide school staff with rigorous training in new forms of instruction, curriculum development, data analysis and school improvement plans. Also, building strong relationships with the principals of low-performing schools is especially beneficial to the intervention process.
- As part of the intervention process, states should focus on specific changes that directly affect the teaching and learning experiences in classrooms. For example, in a few states, such as North Carolina, interventions included targeted class-size reductions, which helped to raise student achievement.

- Some states believe in a tough approach to low-performing schools. In particular, Maryland, New York and Texas find that threatening schools with reconstitution or closure spurs improvement. Other states, like Connecticut and Massachusetts, find that technical assistance, fact-finding and funding give a school the time and support it needs to increase student achievement. While these approaches are not mutually exclusive, some states place more emphasis on one approach, while other states place more emphasis on the other approach.
- Although it is too early to tell, state accountability officials in California think that their use of outside evaluators will yield positive results and facilitate school achievement. According to these officials, using more of a free-market model in providing technical assistance to low-performing schools -- which forces outside providers to compete for the chance to provide such assistance -- will ensure the highest quality of service to these schools.
- Adequate funding for interventions is perhaps the most important factor of all. Even the best-designed set of interventions will fail if they are not adequately funded. Many of the lowest-performing schools need the greatest number of resources to improve, and states must take these needs into account when designing and funding interventions.

## **INTRODUCTION**

State policymakers are increasingly focusing their attention on holding schools and school districts accountable for the performance of their students. One mechanism for ensuring such accountability is state intervention in low-performing schools and school districts. As states create and implement interventions, they seek clarity and understanding about what is known, and what is unknown, about them. This report attempts to provide such clarity and understanding.

The first section of this report provides a general overview of state policies on interventions in low-performing schools and school districts. It also provides a more detailed examination of the state intervention policies and experiences in 11 states. The second section of the report discusses the emerging research about the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and school districts.

The third, and final, section of this report offers five recommendations based on the experiences of the 11 states studied, as well as on the emerging research reviewed for Washington policymakers to consider as they design intervention policies. It also offers several recommendations from state practitioners whom we interviewed in the course of gathering information for this report.

The report also contains two appendices. The first appendix presents three tables on state policies on interventions in low-performing schools and school districts, and the second presents state narratives for each of the 11 states studied.

## **I. STATE POLICIES AND EXPERIENCES WITH INTERVENTIONS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

Based upon our research, 33 states have enacted policies that allow them to intervene in low-performing schools, while 30 states have enacted policies that allow them to intervene in low-performing school districts.

These state policies cover a wide variety of interventions, including the following:

- **Written warning:** Twelve states have enacted policies requiring the state to provide written warnings to low-performing schools, and nine states have enacted policies requiring written warnings to low-performing school districts. In several other states, the state provides a written warning to schools and/or school districts, but is not required to do so by state policy.
- **Technical assistance:** Twenty-six states have enacted policies that require the state or another entity to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools, and 16 states have enacted policies that require the state to provide technical assistance to low-performing school districts. In several other states, the state or another entity provides such assistance to schools and/or school districts, but are not required to do so by state policy.
- **Additional funding:** Eleven states have enacted policies that require the state to provide additional funding to low-performing schools, and nine states have enacted policies that require the state to provide additional funding to low-performing school districts. In several other states, the state provides such funding to schools and/or school districts, but is not required to do so by state policy.
- **Improvement plans by schools and school districts:** Thirty-one states have enacted policies that require a low-performing school to create and implement an improvement plan, and 23 states have enacted policies that require a low-performing school district to create and implement an improvement plan.
- **Improvement plans by another entity:** Twenty-one states have enacted policies that require another entity, such as the state or a school district, to create an improvement plan for a low-performing school, and 15 states have enacted policies that require

another entity, such as the state, to create an improvement plan for a low-performing school district.

- **Placement on probation:** Seventeen states have enacted policies that allow them to place a low-performing school on probation, while fourteen states have enacted policies that allow them to place a low-performing school district on probation.
- **Removal of accreditation:** Fifteen states have enacted policies that allow them to remove a low-performing school's accreditation, while 14 states have enacted policies that allow them to remove a low-performing school district's accreditation.
- **Withholding of funding:** Five states have enacted policies that allow them to withhold funding from a low-performing school, while five states have enacted policies that allow them to withhold funding from a low-performing school district.
- **Reconstitution:** Nineteen states have enacted policies that allow them to reconstitute a low-performing school.
- **Closure:** Ten states have enacted policies that allow them to close a low-performing school.
- **Reorganization:** Ten states have enacted policies that allow them to reorganize a low-performing school district.
- **Takeover:** Seventeen states have enacted policies that allow a takeover of a low-performing school, while 24 states have enacted policies that allow the takeover a low-performing school district.

In addition, as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a federally imposed intervention policy requires school districts to allow students in certain low-performing schools to transfer to higher-performing schools in the school district. Students in low-performing schools that have failed to meet their state's requirements for adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years are allowed to transfer. This policy also requires school districts to provide transportation for the transferring students to the higher-performing schools.

## **An Examination of Intervention Experiences in 11 States**

The development of state interventions in low-performing schools and school districts is a work in progress. To identify the policy challenges and opportunities for states developing their own interventions, we interviewed practitioners in 11 states with intervention experiences. These states are California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Texas and West Virginia. This section examines these states within the context of the intervention categories of technical assistance, additional funding, improvement planning and sanctions.

### ***Technical Assistance***

Each of the 11 states studied provides technical assistance to low-performing schools and/or school districts, although only some of them have enacted policies requiring them to do so. The provision of technical assistance typically begins with a site visit, or visits, to assess the condition of the school or district in question. From these initial visits often come recommendations for improvement, usually in the form of an improvement plan, as well as the implementation of specific actions to raise the performance levels in a school or district, such as curriculum alignment or professional development for staff.

The delivery and duration of technical assistance, however, varies from state to state. In New York, teams of administrators, curriculum specialists, experienced educators, school board members and parents conduct four-day observation visits to assess a troubled school's condition and develop a long-term plan for the school.

In Connecticut, a "critical friend," designated by the state, partners with principals in low-performing schools to assist in the implementation of improvement plans over the course of one school year. North Carolina requires an entire assistance team to spend one full year at its assigned school and provide technical assistance on a daily basis. In Texas,

monitoring teams conduct several one-day site visits to best determine how to help a particular low-performing school.

Through its School Transformation, Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program, Kentucky assigns a distinguished educator to spend up to two years in a school, providing assistance and helping to monitor and implement improvement plans. In Massachusetts, representatives of the state conduct numerous site visits and study the deficiencies of low-performing schools, hoping to resolve the problems that hinder student achievement.

In California, rather than rely on internal resources in the state department of education, the state allows teams of outside evaluators – private consultants, universities, regional educational laboratories or county offices of education – to compete for the chance to assist low-performing schools.

### ***Additional Funding***

Although the correlation between additional funding and increased achievement remains unclear, most of the 11 states studied believe there is some benefit to providing extra resources to troubled schools and districts. In fact, many of them provide additional funding to low-performing schools and/or districts, although only some of them have enacted policies requiring them to do so. In most cases, before the state provides such funding, schools or districts must qualify as underachieving or failing, and create improvement plans.

How states provide such funding varies. California allocates \$50,000 to schools that qualify for the state's Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). For the 2001-02 school year, Massachusetts allocated \$40 million for its Academic Support Services Program and \$5 million for its After School Grant Program, both of which provide additional funding to low-performing schools and school districts.

In New York, extra funding for low-performing schools comes from school districts rather than the state, while Texas does not provide any additional funds to low-performing schools and districts. Although Rhode Island has yet to distribute additional funds to low-performing schools or districts, the State Department of Education made a budget request for \$1 million in funding for low-performing schools in 2003.

How low-performing schools and school districts use additional funds also varies. School districts in Massachusetts use the extra money to extend student-learning time before and after school and on weekends. North Carolina schools use additional funding to purchase instructional materials and bolster professional development programs for staff, and in Connecticut schools may spend extra funds on any activity listed on their school-improvement plans.

### ***Improvement Planning***

The creation of improvement plans for low-performing schools and school districts is an important step in the intervention process. In fact, each of the 11 states studied requires some form of improvement planning, though the process for creating and implementing such plans varies. In some states, the school or district in question must create and implement an improvement plan. In others, the state, or another entity, creates an improvement plan for the school or district, which then must implement it.

While the improvement planning process varies from state to state, there are several constants. Essentially, improvement plans are blueprints for increasing the academic health of individual schools or school districts. Also, as stated earlier, states usually require low-performing schools or districts to submit an improvement plan in order to receive additional funding from the state.

In most cases, improvement plans identify academic or systemic deficiencies and lay out an agenda for improvement. More specifically, improvement plans usually address problems of instruction or leadership, encourage the use of data and student tracking



systems, and set measurable outcomes for the school or district to meet. If a school or district does not meet the goals laid out in the improvement plan, it is then usually subject to sanctions.

### ***Sanctions***

Each of the 11 states studied imposes sanctions on consistently low-performing schools and/or school districts. Such sanctions take many forms. This section highlights the five sanctions of written warnings, probation, reconstitution, closure and takeover.

Several of the 11 states provide written warnings to low-performing schools and/or districts, although only some of them have enacted policies that require them to do so. Written warnings usually inform such schools and districts of their academic deficiencies and demand a change in the near future if the school or district is to avoid more severe sanctions. Written warnings usually precede other interventions, such as technical assistance, improvement plans and additional sanctions.

Massachusetts and West Virginia provide written warnings to underachieving schools and school districts before further action is taken. New Jersey provides written warnings to low-performing districts only, and not schools. New York provides written warnings to low-performing schools only, and not school districts.

Most of the 11 states studied place low-performing schools and/or school districts on probation. For example, West Virginia places low-performing schools and districts on probation before enacting tougher sanctions. During the probationary period, schools and districts are given a specific period of time to improve or risk further penalties. If improvement is demonstrated over time, the state removes the schools or districts from probationary status. Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island and Texas also place low-performing schools and/or districts on probation.

While most of the 11 states studied have enacted policies that allow them to reconstitute and/or close low-performing schools, only two states, Maryland and New York, have taken such drastic steps. A reconstitution usually involves creating a new philosophy, developing a new curriculum and hiring new staff at a low-performing school. In 2000, Maryland took over and reconstituted three low-performing schools in the Baltimore City Public School System, and then contracted with Edison Schools Inc. to manage the schools. Since 1990, New York has reconstituted 46 schools as well as closed three schools.

While several of the 11 states studied have enacted policies that allow the state to take over low-performing schools, only one state, Maryland, has actually implemented this policy, as detailed in the previous paragraph.

Each of the 11 states studied has enacted policies allowing the state to take over a low-performing school district. In a state takeover of a school district, either the state legislature, the state board of education or a federal court charges the state department of education or another designated entity, such as a city's mayor, with managing a school district, usually for a certain amount of time, such as five years.

There have been takeovers of school districts in 10 of the 11 states studied. There has been one takeover in Rhode Island; two takeovers in Maryland, New York and Texas; three takeovers in New Jersey; four takeovers in California, Connecticut and West Virginia; and five takeovers in Kentucky.

## **II. Research on the Impact of State Interventions on Low-Performing Schools and School Districts**

Research into the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and school districts is just beginning to emerge, especially as these interventions affect school and district operations and student achievement. There are two reasons for the current shortage of definitive research on state interventions. The first reason is the relative infancy of most state interventions. Since many state accountability systems that contain state interventions, such as California's, Connecticut's and Rhode Island's, are only a few years old, there simply has not been enough time to study and understand the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and districts.

The second reason for the current shortage of definitive research is that many interventions are implemented in combination with other interventions, and therefore the research seldom examines the impact of a single intervention. While there is considerable anecdotal evidence that some interventions have powerful effects, the research does not yet shed consistent light on the efficacy of particular interventions in low-performing schools and districts.

What little research does exist suggests that interventions shouldn't be expected to equally affect low-performing schools and school districts. One of the main reasons is that many schools or schools districts simply do not have the resources to implement changes. From the body of research about schools' and school districts' abilities to implement reforms, often referred to as "local capacity," it is clear that local context plays a critical role in how well interventions take root in schools and districts. According to this research, schools' or districts' varying ability to implement reforms is an important reason why interventions have different results in different places.<sup>3</sup>

With these issues in mind, this section of the report considers the available research about the state interventions of technical assistance, additional funding, improvement plans, reconstitutions and takeovers, as well as about the federal intervention of school choice.

It also provides a brief summary of the research about schools' and districts' abilities to implement reforms.

### **Technical Assistance**

Kentucky and North Carolina provide two notable examples of state-provided technical assistance, and early research on these efforts shows a positive impact on student achievement.

Kentucky's STAR program sends a distinguished educator to each low-performing school. These individuals spend up to two years at each site, helping to guide lessons and mentor staff. All 53 Kentucky schools that participated in the STAR program's first cycle in 1994 reversed a declining performance trend after two years, and 63% showed student growth beyond the expected rate for the school. In the second STAR cycle, approximately 200 schools participated, with 91% reversing their downward trend after two years.

North Carolina's approach is similar, but uses technical assistance teams rather than distinguished educators. Of the 15 low-performing schools that were assigned such teams in 1997-1998, all of them moved out of the low-performing category, and 13 showed exemplary growth.<sup>4</sup>

One explanation for the success of these approaches lies in their comprehensive nature. Each state carefully screens, selects, trains and provides ongoing support for the technical assistance providers. Each state has also emphasized the goal of building schools' and districts' abilities to identify and solve school- and district-specific problems and to track school and district progress toward achievement goals.

### **Additional Funding**

At this point, research does not show a clear impact on instruction or achievement from providing additional funding to low-performing schools and school districts, primarily for two reasons. First, such provision is relatively new, and the research is just beginning to emerge. Second, additional funding is generally provided in combination with other interventions, so it is impossible to link improvement directly and solely to the influence of additional funds.

Still, early research on California's Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) shows promising results from providing additional funding to low-performing schools. The II/USP provides additional resources to low-performing schools that choose to participate in the program, but these resources come with strings attached.

Participating schools must draft an action plan in the first year of the program and work to implement the plan in the second and third years. Additional resources are provided to schools – planning grants of \$50,000 in the first year, and \$200 per student in the second and third years -- to be spent as needed. After 24 months, if a school has not met its Academic Performance Index (API) growth targets, it is subject to a series of sanctions that may culminate in a state takeover of the school.

The first cohort of II/USP schools was selected in 1999. Data on the success of this initial cohort is conflicting. According to a 2002 study of the program by Hoover Institution researchers, the II/USP has great potential for raising student achievement *in the types of schools that take the initiative to participate in this type of reform effort*. II/USP schools raised their APIs significantly more in two years than other schools that applied for the program but were not selected, but not more than other schools who were eligible but did not apply. It appears that randomly selecting a low-performing school for the program does not automatically ensure improvement. Only schools that are apt or prepared to apply for such programs can expect to consistently succeed. The identification of factors that play a role in whether schools participate in this type of program, such as ambitious school leadership, is a key step in targeting such interventions to those schools where they will have the greatest chance of succeeding.<sup>5</sup>

## **Improvement Plans**

The evidence linking mandated improvement plans for low-performing schools and school districts to increases in achievement is mixed. Some schools and districts increase achievement, while others do not. One explanation for this variation is that low-performing schools and districts frequently focus on the form of improvement planning, such as holding meetings, rather than on the substance, such as focusing on goals for student achievement, gathering data to examine progress toward those goals, and providing supports and pressures so that teachers meet those goals.

According to Mike Schmoker, an educational consultant who specializes in school improvement, improvement planning often does not address key needs such as strengthening teachers' assessment skills, aligning instruction with assessments, and supporting collaborative professional development for teachers. Instead, they set off a riot of activities that, in worst-case scenarios, distract schools from the problem of improving instruction.<sup>6</sup>

Another potential problem with improvement plans is getting school and district staff to buy into them. If administrators and teachers are not on board with the improvement plan, successful implementation may be extremely difficult.

## **Reconstitutions**

A reconstitution usually involves creating a new philosophy, developing a new curriculum and hiring new staff at a low-performing school. Much of the research evidence about reconstituting low-performing schools comes from large urban school districts. Although little systematic evidence about the effects of reconstitutions on student achievement exists, anecdotal information suggests that reconstitutions may improve school order, stability and community involvement.

A 1992 study of the San Francisco Unified School District's school improvement program initiated in 1983 found improved student achievement in reconstituted schools with high proportions of poor or minority students. But in the schools reconstituted since 1994 in the district, there is little, if any, improvement in scores on standardized tests.<sup>7</sup> Further, teachers called the reconstitution "degrading" and said that it "sent morale down the tubes."<sup>8</sup>

New York's reconstitution efforts provide a similarly mixed picture. In New York, a reconstitution involves replacing up to 50% of the staff and creating a new instructional approach in a low-performing school. During the 1997-98 school year, only 16 of 86 low-performing schools, or Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) as they are called, met all performance targets, although most SURR schools improved their performance from the prior year in their problem areas.<sup>9</sup>

## **Takeovers**

There is limited research on the effects of takeovers of school districts. For the most part, they seem to be yielding more improvement in central-office financial and management practices than in classroom instructional practices. As evidence, takeovers are credited with the following:

- Eliminating nepotism from a school district's decision-making processes
- Improving a school district's administrative and financial management practices
- Removing the threat of teachers' strikes within a school district
- Upgrading the physical condition of schools within a school district
- Implementing innovative programs within a school district, such as small-schools programs and cooperative arrangements between schools and social service agencies.

In some cases, however, takeovers have produced negative results, such as the \$70 million deficit incurred by state-appointed administrators in Newark, New Jersey, and the

10-day teachers' strike in Detroit, Michigan, which occurred six months after the mayor assumed control of the school district.

Perhaps more important, student achievement still oftentimes falls short of expectations after a takeover. In most cases, academic results are usually mixed at best, with increases in student performance in some areas, such as 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, and decreases in student performance in other areas, such as 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics. The bottom line is that takeovers, for the most part, have yet to produce dramatic and consistent increases in student performance, as is necessary in many of the school districts that are taken over.

Still, a recent study by Vanderbilt University and Harvard University researchers produced four broad conclusions regarding the relationship between takeovers and academic performance:

- Takeovers placing mayors in charge of school districts are linked to increases in student achievement at the elementary grades.
- Gains in achievement are especially large for the lowest-performing schools in these school districts, suggesting that takeovers involving mayors include a special focus on these failing schools.
- Takeovers placing mayors in charge of school districts seem less effective for the upper grades, where the cumulative effects of many years of poor schooling are not easily reversible.
- When takeovers placing the state department of education in charge of school districts produce administrative and political turmoil, student achievement suffers. After a period of adjustment, however, these takeovers may also be able to produce positive achievement gains.<sup>10</sup>

Further, two promising experiences stand out among the various takeovers of school districts. First, as a result of a takeover of the Logan County, West Virginia, school district, test scores increased, management improved and local support was strengthened. According to the former West Virginia Superintendent of Schools, the takeover



succeeded in Logan County because it kept the school board in place, albeit with reduced powers. State officials felt that the school district's decision-makers needed to be a part of the recovery process, largely so they would know what to do when the school district regained sole control of its operations. Results of the takeover include:

- Performance, attendance and dropout rates improved dramatically.
- Administrative difficulties and budget problems were resolved.
- Personnel policies and practices now comply with the law (e.g., all of the school district's teachers now have valid teacher licenses).

Second, in 1995, the Illinois legislature shifted control of the Chicago Public Schools to the mayor and charged him with appointing school board members, the school board president and the school district's chief executive officer. According to 1997 and 1998 studies by the University of Chicago, these changes have improved managerial efficiencies within the school district.<sup>11</sup> In addition, according to a 1998 study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, standardized test scores strongly suggest that the 1995 changes, along with earlier reforms such as the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act, have precipitated substantial improvements in achievement in a large number of Chicago public elementary schools.<sup>12</sup>

## **School Choice**

As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a federally imposed intervention policy requires school districts to allow students in low-performing schools to transfer to higher-performing schools in the district. This policy also requires school districts to provide transportation for the transferring students to the higher-performing schools.

At the same time, the No Child Left Behind Act increases federal support for voluntary public school choice programs, such as magnet schools and open enrollment, as well as for charter schools.

Because the federal government's policy that requires school districts to allow students in low-performing schools to transfer to higher performing schools is new, there is no evidence about its impact. There is evidence, though, about the impact of other school choice policies. According to this research, the attempts of magnet schools, open enrollment programs and charter schools to provide disadvantaged students with greater educational options have produced mixed results.

Although designed initially to reduce ethnic segregation and promote a diverse student body, magnet schools primarily attract higher-income students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, although enrollment in magnet schools has tripled in the past decade, low-income students remain underrepresented in most programs.<sup>13</sup>

Such underrepresentation is attributed to the proposition that families with the greatest amount of resources typically have access to information regarding magnet programs that poorer families lack. One researcher found that even knowing of the term "magnet school" depended on a parent's ethnicity and income level.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, since academic magnets often apply a high degree of selectivity to the admissions process, high-achieving students are often separated from lower-achieving peers, clustering struggling students in low-performing schools. However, career magnets in places like New York City reduce ethnic and class separation through a lottery system that accepts students randomly.

In open enrollment programs, despite efforts to reach out to low-income and minority children, middle- and upper-class students still constitute the bulk of participants. Similar to parents who choose magnet programs, middle- or upper-income families typically have the time, resources and education levels necessary to investigate open enrollment options. Simply knowing what choices exist and how to apply for them contributes to increased participation in the programs.

For example, a study of the New York City open enrollment program found a lack of publicity and a complex application process limited the effectiveness of the plan in reaching out to low-income families.<sup>15</sup> A study of the Boulder Valley School District's open enrollment system found that high-achieving white students tended to be the ones fleeing low-performing public schools for charter or wealthier neighborhood schools.<sup>16</sup> This is mainly the result of a familiarity with the options and an understanding of how to navigate the system. Minnesota seems to be having the greatest success in involving minority students with its statewide open enrollment plan, with 40% minority student participation.<sup>17</sup>

Of the three public school choice programs discussed, charter schools serve the greatest number of minority and low-income children. According to figures from the U.S. Department of Education, charter schools enrolled a larger percentage of students of color than all public schools in the states with charter schools. Charter schools in Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina and Texas actually enroll a much higher percentage of minority students than all public schools in those states. In the states that have charter programs, charter schools also enroll a slightly higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.<sup>18</sup> On the flip side, charter schools have served a slightly lower proportion of students with disabilities than all public schools in the states with charter schools.

The impact of school choice programs on student achievement is undecided. Preliminary research suggests that magnet schools, open enrollment programs and charter schools experience varying levels of achievement. But the choice movement is too young to yield any definitive results. More research and evidence are needed before anyone truly understands the real long-term benefits or detriments of public school choice programs' effects on student learning.

## **Schools' and Districts' Abilities to Implement Reforms**

As the above sections illustrate, the research does not provide strong conclusions about the effects of various state interventions on school and district operations and on student achievement, largely because local responses to state interventions vary widely. Factors that contribute to this variation include:

- The particular combination of interventions that are applied to low-performing schools and districts
- The amount of time that low-performing schools and districts are given to raise their performance
- The amount of support provided to low-performing schools and districts, and the perceived relevance of that support to local needs
- Whether the school, district or state initiates the improvement process
- The extent to which local stakeholders buy into any external intervention process.

Given the interplay of these factors, researchers note that low-performing schools and school districts may have increased or reduced motivation to make changes, depending on their circumstances and ability to implement reforms.<sup>19</sup>

In 1995, the Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) developed a helpful framework that describes where local barriers to improvement may be located. By identifying school and district needs in relation to the barriers in this framework, states may target interventions with a better likelihood of success. This framework contains five key dimensions:

- Vision and leadership, in which district and school leadership and staff share a common purpose. This purpose is focused on (1) improved achievement for all students, (2) curriculum and instruction, and (3) teacher responsibility for student learning. Schools with problems in this area, for instance, might suffer from chronic leadership turnover or a non-achievement-oriented focus for students.

- Collective commitment and cultural norms to realize the vision. The most actively reforming schools in the CPRE study were characterized by a sense of schoolwide responsibility for student learning. In addition, the schools demonstrated a set of cultural norms that stressed ongoing improvement, and they used data to monitor constant progress. Schools that have problems in this area may suffer from high staff turnover, lack of staff cohesion, or norms where “anything goes” in the classroom.
- Knowledge or access to knowledge about specific strategies for improvement, such as targeted, sustained professional development. District and school personnel must be able to access this knowledge to improve student achievement. Schools with problems in this area may lack funds or time for targeted, sustained professional development designed to raise student achievement, or they may be participating in the wrong kind of professional development. They also may lack adequate, timely performance information about their students.
- Organizational structures that support better instruction. These include common planning time for teacher collaboration, extended class schedules, and extended day or year programs. The common denominator is that structures are designed and targeted to support improved student learning. Some problems in this area are obstacles to after-school programs, such as a lack of space, and union agreements that specify the maximum number of hours that teachers may work.
- Adequate resources, including funds, time, personnel and materials.<sup>20</sup> Schools with problems in this area may lack adequate funds for professional development, a supply of well-prepared teachers, or appropriate materials.

### **III. Policy Recommendations and State Practitioner Advice**

Based on our review of state policies and experiences as well as a review of the research, it appears that state interventions designed to assess and maximize existing abilities in low-performing schools and districts and to exert appropriate pressure for change may be the most likely to improve school and district operations and to raise student achievement. Within the context of this observation, we offer five recommendations. In addition, we provide the advice of state practitioners whom we interviewed in the course of gathering information for this study.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

*Recommendation #1: For the greatest impact on school and school district performance, states should target technical assistance to the individual needs of schools and districts.*

It does not make sense for a school to buy new textbooks if what it lacks is good leadership. But a one-size-fits-all intervention does just that type of thing. Promising state models for targeted technical assistance include Connecticut, Kentucky and North Carolina. The approaches in these states link technical-assistance providers with local practitioners to assess specific school needs and plan accordingly.

Similarly, the strong-schools accountability model, developed by University of Washington researchers, encourages interventions that are specific to particular site needs. States identify low-performing schools using state test scores, but a deeper examination of those schools takes place in a triage approach. Site visits are conducted to assess particular problems, and information gathered from those site visits is used to create specific school improvement plans.<sup>21</sup>

States must consider the cost implications in a targeted approach to technical assistance, though. Such assistance uses more resources in fewer sites, while providing a greater chance that those sites will substantially improve. States must weigh the relative benefits

of such an approach against the available amount of resources for technical assistance efforts, and should consider the following questions in making resource allocation decisions:

- How many low-performing schools are in the state? How much pressure is there to improve them?
- Where are low-performing schools in relation to the cutoff point for reaching the state's academic standards? Are they relatively close to this point, or are they extremely low-performing?
- Do low-performing schools serve particular populations that may require more intensive interventions?

*Recommendation #2: States should develop a pool of technical- assistance providers for low-performing schools and districts, and a pool of supplemental-services providers for low-income students in low-performing schools.*

In general, states do not have the resources to provide adequate technical assistance to all of their low-performing schools and districts. Therefore, it is important to ensure that such schools and districts have access to a variety of assistance providers from the public and private sectors.

This issue is particularly relevant in light of certain provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As part of this law, the federal government requires certain low-performing schools to offer their low-income students the opportunity to receive instruction from a supplemental-services provider of their choice. Under the law, students in low-performing schools that have failed to meet their state's requirements for AYP for three consecutive years are allowed to obtain such instruction. The law also requires that states approve the supplemental-services providers.

States should coordinate the development of a pool of technical-assistance providers for schools and districts and a pool of supplemental-services providers for students, as well as establish criteria for providers to be included in such pools.

These criteria should be tied to evidence of effectiveness, using the federal government's definition of "scientifically based research" evidence as much as possible. States should also take into account the variety of student, school and school district needs across the state. Because of geographic constraints, states may want to consider the efficacy of technology-based services, particularly for remote rural areas. Finally, the criteria should maintain a focus on improving student achievement.

*Recommendation #3: State intervention policies for school and school district improvement plans should focus on improving student achievement, setting realistic improvement goals and requiring regular monitoring of school and district progress.*

As mentioned earlier in this report, tying improvement plan requirements directly to the use of student achievement data helps to focus schools and districts directly on student learning. By focusing on improving student achievement, setting realistic improvement goals and requiring regular monitoring of progress toward goals, state policies help to ensure that ongoing improvement becomes part of the culture of schools and districts.

Focusing improvement policies in these ways helps school and district officials target areas where students are having particular problems. Further, improvement policies requiring schools and districts to target professional development to classroom strategies specific to these problem areas provides help to teachers where it is most needed and where improvement will be seen most quickly.

*Recommendation #4: If states create and implement takeover policies, they should ensure that takeover efforts focus on: establishing clear performance goals and measures, especially concerning academics; creating and implementing improvement strategies*



*specific to the problems in the school or school district in question, particularly regarding improved instruction; defining the conditions under which the state will return control of the school or school district to local officials; and, when possible, partnering with local officials in the improvement effort.*

Although the research evidence about takeovers is relatively limited, several lessons are emerging from the states' experiences with takeovers. First, it appears that those places that are achieving the greatest success placed a high priority on improving academic performance at the outset of the takeover. While it is important to address financial problems, such as budget deficits, as well as management problems in school districts, officials should tackle these problems in the context of their larger goal of improving student achievement.

Second, takeovers are simply governance changes for the sake of governance changes if they are not connected to the implementation of strategies that directly impact the teaching and learning experience in classrooms. Therefore, after a takeover, officials should study and identify the specific problems in a school or school district, establish clear performance goals and measure and create and implement improvement strategies specific to the problems in the school or school district in question, particularly regarding improved instruction.

Third, many states that have taken over school districts have struggled to return control to local officials. This fact is oftentimes due to states' failing to set clear terms for giving the power over the school district's operations back to the locally elected school board and local superintendent. Also, states are sometimes concerned about the ability of local officials to continue improvement efforts and not revert back to unproductive practices.

Therefore, after studying and identifying the specific problems in a school or school district, states should define the conditions under which the state will return control of the school or school district to local officials. Also, when possible, states should partner with local officials in the improvement effort. Such a partnership should build the knowledge

and skills of these officials so that they know what to do when the school or school district regains sole control of its operations.

*Recommendation #5: In creating and refining state intervention policies for low-performing schools and districts, states should take into account the requirements and implications of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, particularly as they relate to providing assistance to low-performing schools.*

As states create and refine intervention policies for low-performing schools and districts, they should take into account the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001:

- **State Academic Standards and Student Achievement Standards** (Title 1, Part A, Sec. 1111, Subsection (b)): Requires states to demonstrate that they have adopted challenging academic content and student achievement standards for all children.
- **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** (Title 1, Part A, Sec. 1111, Subsection (b)): Requires states to demonstrate that they have adopted a single statewide accountability system for defining “adequate yearly progress” for all public school students.
- **Annual Student Testing** (Title 1, Part A, Sec. 1111, Subsection b (3,4,5): Beginning in 2005-06, states are required to test all students annually in grades 3-8 in mathematics and reading or language arts, with reasonable adaptations and accommodations for students with disabilities and students of limited-English proficiency.
- **Participation in Biennial NAEP** (Title 1, Part A, Sec. 1111): States are required to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) every other year in grades 4 and 8 for reading and mathematics, beginning in the 2002-03 school year.
- **State Report Cards** (Title 1, Part A, Sec. 1111): Not later than the beginning of the 2002-03 school year, states and school districts that receive Title I funding must prepare and disseminate annual report cards.

- **Consequences for Low-Performing Schools/School Districts** (Title I, Part A, Sec. 1116): For states and school districts receiving Title I funds, ESEA outlines requirements for setting a timeline and establishing consequences for school and district performance relative to adequate yearly progress. School districts and state departments of education have parallel responsibilities in the intervention process for schools and districts, respectively.
- **School Support and Recognition** (Title I, Part A, Sec. 1117): States are to develop support systems for schools using resources from regional centers and laboratories, as well as other technical-assistance providers. Priority goes to districts with schools subject to corrective action and school improvement policies.

In particular, states should consider the implications of the requirement that the tests and formulas that states use to designate schools as low-performing, or not meeting their state's AYP requirements, are the same for all schools in the state. Only low-performing schools that receive money from the federal Title I program, however, are required to participate in the interventions specified in NCLB, as long as they are consistent with state law.

The pressing implications of this requirement include:

- The number of schools that have been identified as low-performing, and whether or not they receive money from the federal Title I program
- The federal requirements for interventions in those schools
- Federal and state resources for assisting low-performing schools.

For states with large numbers of low-performing schools, one potential problem is the amount of resources necessary to adequately address the problems in these schools. Not only will such a situation dilute resources, but it may also diminish the effects of the various state interventions spread out across a large number of schools. Therefore, states must decide about the trade-offs between focusing resources in a smaller number of schools and diffusing resources across a larger number of schools.

## **Advice from State Practitioners**

As we gathered information for this report, a number of accountability officials from states with established intervention programs offered several recommendations, including the following:

- Technical assistance should be in-depth and targeted to the individual needs of schools and school districts. Allowing improvement teams or technical experts to assist a school on a daily basis – like in Kentucky and Connecticut – for a lengthy period of time allows the intervention process to grow and respond to a school’s unique needs.
- Professional development is an essential part of the intervention process. For example, establishing leadership academies for principals and mentoring programs for teachers may provide school staff with rigorous training in new forms of instruction, curriculum development, data analysis and school improvement plans. Also, building strong relationships with the principals of low-performing schools is especially beneficial to the intervention process.
- As part of the intervention process, states should include specific changes that directly affect the teaching and learning experiences in classrooms. For example, in a few states, such as North Carolina, interventions included targeted class-size reductions, which, according to state officials, helped raise student achievement in these states. The research on class size reduction is mixed, however, and most researchers agree that class reduction is effective only when it is one piece of a larger, teaching quality reform effort.
- Some states believe in a tough approach to low-performing schools. In particular, Maryland, New York and Texas find that threatening schools with reconstitution or closure spurs improvement. Other states, like Connecticut and Massachusetts, find technical assistance, fact-finding and funding give a school the time and support it needs to increase student achievement. While these approaches are not mutually

exclusive, some states place more emphasis on one approach, while other states place more emphasis on the other approach.

- Although it is too early to tell, state accountability officials in California think that their use of outside evaluators will yield positive results and facilitate school achievement. According to these officials, using more of a free-market model in providing technical assistance to low-performing schools -- which forces outside providers to compete for the chance to provide such assistance -- will ensure the highest quality of service to these schools.
- Adequate funding for interventions is perhaps the most important factor of all. Even the best-designed set of interventions will fail if they are not adequately funded. How much a school or a district needs will vary from state to state and situation to situation. The needs of individual schools and districts are often very different, as are the levels of funding required for improvement. Often – but certainly not always – the best measure is that schools that perform the lowest, or fail to improve after the first year, need extra resources. Many of the lowest-performing schools need the greatest number of resources to improve, and states must take these needs into account when designing and funding interventions.

## Appendix A: State Policies on Interventions in Low-Performing Schools and School Districts

### Overview of State Policies on Interventions in Low-Performing Schools and School Districts

According to our research, 33 states have enacted policies that allow them to intervene in low-performing schools, while 30 states have enacted policies that allow them to intervene in low-performing school districts.

<u>State</u>	<u>Has the State Enacted Policies that Allow the State to Intervene in Schools on the Basis of Performance?</u>	<u>Has the State Enacted Policies that Allow the State to Intervene in School Districts on the Basis of Performance?</u>
Alabama	Yes	Yes
Alaska	Yes	No
Arizona	Yes	No
Arkansas	Yes	Yes
California	Yes	Yes
Colorado	Yes	Yes
Connecticut	Yes	Yes
Delaware	Yes	Yes
Florida	Yes	Yes
Georgia	Yes	No
Hawaii	No	No
Idaho	No	No
Illinois	Yes	Yes
Indiana	Yes	Yes
Iowa	No	Yes
Kansas	Yes	Yes
Kentucky	Yes	Yes
Louisiana	Yes	No
Maine	No	No
Maryland	Yes	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes

<u>State</u>	<u>Has the State Enacted Policies that Allow the State to Intervene in Schools on the Basis of Performance?</u>	<u>Has the State Enacted Policies that Allow the State to Intervene in School Districts on the Basis of Performance?</u>
Michigan	Yes	Yes
Minnesota	No	No
Mississippi	No	Yes
Missouri	Yes	Yes
Montana	No	No
Nebraska	No	No
Nevada	Yes	No
New Hampshire	No	No
New Jersey	No	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	Yes
New York	Yes	Yes
North Carolina	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	No	No
Ohio	No	Yes
Oklahoma	Yes	Yes
Oregon	Yes	No
Pennsylvania	No	Yes
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	Yes
South Dakota	No	No
Tennessee	Yes	Yes
Texas	Yes	Yes
Utah	No	No
Vermont	Yes	No
Virginia	Yes	No
Washington	No	No
West Virginia	Yes	Yes
Wisconsin	No	No
Wyoming	Yes	Yes

## State Policies for Interventions in Low-Performing Schools

The following chart addresses the following questions concerning interventions in schools based on performance:

1. Has the state enacted a policy that requires the state to provide written warnings to low-performing schools?
2. Has the state enacted a policy that requires the state or another entity to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools?
3. Has the state enacted a policy that requires the state to provide additional funding to low-performing schools?
4. Has the state enacted a policy that requires low-performing schools to create and implement improvement plans?
5. Has the state enacted a policy that requires another entity, such as the state or a school district, to create improvement plans for low-performing schools?
6. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to place low-performing schools on probation?
7. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to remove a low-performing school's accreditation?
8. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to withhold funding from low-performing schools?
9. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to reconstitute low-performing schools?
10. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to close low-performing schools?
11. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to take over low-performing schools?

<u>State</u>	<u>1.Written Warning?</u>	<u>2.Technical Assistance?</u>	<u>3.More Funding?</u>	<u>4.Plan by School?</u>	<u>5.Plan by Other Entity?</u>	<u>6.Place on Probation?</u>	<u>7.Remove Accreditation?</u>	<u>8.Withhold Funding?</u>	<u>9.Reconstitute School?</u>	<u>10.Close School?</u>	<u>11.Take Over School?</u>
Alabama	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Alaska	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No



<b>State</b>	<b><u>1.Written Warning?</u></b>	<b><u>2.Technical Assistance?</u></b>	<b><u>3.More Funding?</u></b>	<b><u>4.Plan by School?</u></b>	<b><u>5.Plan by Other Entity?</u></b>	<b><u>6.Place on Probation?</u></b>	<b><u>7.Remove Accreditation?</u></b>	<b><u>8.Withhold Funding?</u></b>	<b><u>9.Reconstitute School?</u></b>	<b><u>10.Close School?</u></b>	<b><u>11.Take Over School?</u></b>
Arizona	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Arkansas	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
California	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Connecticut	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Delaware	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Florida	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Georgia	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Illinois <sup>12</sup>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Indiana	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Kansas	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Kentucky	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Louisiana	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Maryland	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Michigan	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Minnesota	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Missouri	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Nevada	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
New York <sup>13</sup>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
North Carolina	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Oklahoma	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oregon	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Rhode Island	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Tennessee	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Texas	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vermont	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Virginia	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

<u>State</u>	<u>1.Written Warning?</u>	<u>2.Technical Assistance?</u>	<u>3.More Funding?</u>	<u>4.Plan by School?</u>	<u>5.Plan by Other Entity?</u>	<u>6.Place on Probation?</u>	<u>7.Remove Accreditation?</u>	<u>8.Withhold Funding?</u>	<u>9.Reconstitute School?</u>	<u>10.Close School?</u>	<u>11.Take Over School?</u>
<b>West Virginia</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Wyoming</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

According to our research:

1. 12 states have enacted policies that require the state to provide written warnings to low-performing schools. In several other states, the state provides a written warning to schools, but is not required to do so by state policy.
2. 26 states have enacted policies that require the state or another entity to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools. In several other states, the state or another entity provides such assistance to schools, but are not required to do so by state policy.
3. 11 states have enacted policies that require the state to provide additional funding to low-performing schools. In several other states, the state provides such funding to schools, but is not required to do so by state policy.
4. 31 states have enacted policies that require low-performing schools to create and implement an improvement plan.
5. 21 states have enacted policies that require another entity, such as the state or a school district, to create an improvement plan for low-performing schools.
6. 17 states have enacted policies that allow the state to place low-performing schools on probation.
7. 15 states have enacted policies that allow the state to remove a low-performing school's accreditation.
8. 5 states have enacted policies that allow the state to withhold funding from low-performing schools.
9. 19 states have enacted policies that allow the state to reconstitute low-performing schools.
10. 10 states have enacted policies that allow the state to close low-performing schools.
11. 17 states have enacted policies that allow the state to take over low-performing schools.

## State Policies for Interventions in Low-Performing School Districts

The following chart addresses the following questions concerning interventions in school districts based on performance:

1. Has the state enacted a policy that requires the state to provide written warnings to low-performing school districts?
2. Has the state enacted a policy that requires the state or another entity to provide technical assistance to low-performing school districts?
3. Has the state enacted a policy that requires the state to provide additional funding to low-performing school districts?
4. Has the state enacted a policy that requires low-performing school districts to create and implement improvement plans?
5. Has the state enacted a policy that requires another entity, such as the state, to create improvement plans for low-performing school districts?
6. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to place low-performing school districts on probation?
7. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to remove a low-performing school district's accreditation?
8. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to withhold funding from low-performing school districts?
9. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to reorganize low-performing school districts?
10. Has the state enacted a policy that allows the state to take over low-performing school districts?

<u>State</u>	<u>1.Written Warning?</u>	<u>2.Technical Assistance?</u>	<u>3.More Funding?</u>	<u>4.Plan by School District?</u>	<u>5.Plan by Other Entity?</u>	<u>6.Place on Probation?</u>	<u>7.Removal of Accreditation?</u>	<u>8.Withhold Funding?</u>	<u>9.Reorganize School District?</u>	<u>10.Take Over School District?</u>
Alabama	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Arkansas	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
California	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes

<b>State</b>	<b><u>1.Written Warning?</u></b>	<b><u>2.Technical Assistance?</u></b>	<b><u>3.More Funding?</u></b>	<b><u>4.Plan by School District?</u></b>	<b><u>5.Plan by Other Entity?</u></b>	<b><u>6.Place on Probation?</u></b>	<b><u>7.Removal of Accreditation?</u></b>	<b><u>8.Withhold Funding?</u></b>	<b><u>9.Reorganize School District?</u></b>	<b><u>10.Take Over School District?</u></b>
Colorado	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Connecticut	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Delaware	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Florida	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Illinois	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indiana	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Iowa	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Kansas	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Kentucky	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Maryland	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Michigan	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Mississippi	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Missouri	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
New Jersey	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
New York <sup>9</sup>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
North Carolina	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Ohio	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Oklahoma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Rhode Island	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Tennessee	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Texas	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
West Virginia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Wyoming	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No

According to our research:

1. Nine states have enacted policies that require the state to provide written warnings to low-performing school districts. In several other states, the state provides a written warning to school districts, but is not required to do so by state policy.
2. Sixteen states have enacted policies that require the state or another entity to provide technical assistance to low-performing school districts. In several other states, the state or another entity provides such assistance to school districts, but are not required to do so by state policy.
3. Nine states have enacted policies that require the state to provide additional funding to low-performing school districts. In several other states, the state provides such funding to school districts, but is not required to do so by state policy.
4. Twenty-three states have enacted policies that require low-performing school districts to create and implement an improvement plan.
5. Fifteen states have enacted policies that require another entity, such as the state, to create an improvement plan for low-performing school districts.
6. Fourteen states have enacted policies that allow the state to place low-performing school districts on probation.
7. Fourteen states have enacted policies that allow the state to remove a low-performing school district's accreditation.
8. Five states have enacted policies that allow the state to withhold funding from low-performing school districts.
9. Ten states have enacted policies that allow the state to reorganize low-performing school districts.
10. Twenty-four states have enacted policies that allow the state to take over low-performing school districts.

## **Appendix B: State Narratives**

### California

In 1999, California started the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), and allowed schools that scored below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on state assessments during the 1998-99 school year to apply to this program.<sup>22</sup> With II/USP, California is taking a unique approach to intervention that sets it apart from other states. Rather than rely on internal resources in the state department of education, the state allows teams of outside evaluators – private consultants, universities, regional educational laboratories or county offices of education – to compete for the chance to assist low-performing schools. These teams provide technical assistance to troubled schools and assist in the writing of school improvement plans.

The state selected 430 schools, and each school chose its team of outside evaluators from a list of 80 such evaluators. These schools also created improvement committees comprised of school staff, non-school personnel and parents. Over the course of one year, the schools developed an improvement plan. Once the team of outside evaluators, the school district and the state approved a school's improvement plan, the state gave \$50,000 to each school.

If the improvement process fails to improve a school's results, a school is subject to a wide range of state sanctions, including removal of staff, reorganization of the school, including reconstitution as a charter school, public school choice for students and closure.

Since the implementation of the II/USP, test scores in general have risen, but achievement gaps seem to be growing due to a lack of qualified teachers in at-risk schools. There is also some question about whether funding and assistance are reaching the schools in the most difficult situations.<sup>23</sup> Reactions to the II/USP have been fairly positive, however, with principals and teachers approving of the professional

development opportunities and the overall improvement planning process. This buy-in from school staff may spell success for the program's future.

Finally, California has taken over four school districts since 1991:

- In 1991, the state took over the Richmond Unified School District (now known as the West Contra Costa Unified School District) due to financial problems within the district, and hired an administrator to run the district. In 1992, the state removed the administrator, and designated a trustee to monitor the district's financial performance.
- In 1992, the state took over the Coachella Unified School District due to financial problems within the district, and hired an administrator to run the district. In 1996, the state removed the administrator, and designated a trustee to monitor the district's financial performance.
- In 1993, the state took over the Compton Unified School District due to financial problems within the district. In 1993, the state legislature passed a law that required the takeover to also address inadequate student performance in the school district. In 2001, the state removed the administrator, and designated a trustee to monitor the academic and financial performance of the school district.
- In 2001, the state took over the Emery Unified School District due to financial problems within the school district, and hired an administrator to run the school district.

## Connecticut

Connecticut's school accountability program dates back to 1999. Since that time, the state has provided technical assistance and additional funding to low-performing schools in an effort to improve student performance.

Under the guidance of the state department of education, a team from each of the state's 28 low-performing schools wrote a school improvement plan designed to address inadequacies at each school. The state assigned an individual known as a critical friend to the principals at each of the schools to assist in the implementation of the school improvement plans. Among other things, these individuals sit in on school improvement team meetings, review grants and provide training to school staff.

The state also established a principal's training academy for the principals at each of the schools. This academy provides rigorous training in data analysis, school reform, early learning plans and school improvement plans. In addition, Brown University carried out site visits to each of the schools, as well as analyzed the data surrounding student achievement and progress on the school improvement plans.

The state provided student assessment data to each school so they may monitor student progress and adjust the curriculum as necessary. The state also allotted \$232,353 in fiscal year 2000-01 and \$50,000 in fiscal year 2001-02 to assist low-performing schools. These funds were shared by all of the low-performing schools, to be used for any activity listed on the school's improvement plan.

Connecticut has yet to implement sanctions as part of this program. If schools do not demonstrate sufficient progress by February 2003, however, the state may implement sanctions, including school reconstitutions and closures.

State officials believe that threatening low-performing schools and withholding funding from them is counterproductive to the school improvement process. Instead, they



recommend being supportive of principals and staff, and clearly outlining indicators, objectives and outcomes in the school improvement plans as the best way to ensure improvement.

More specifically, state officials have found the following approaches to be particularly useful in helping schools improve their performance: providing comprehensive technical assistance; developing and implementing specific school improvement plans; conducting workshops for principals and staff, helping them to understand data analysis, student assessment trends and performance measures; and building strong relationships between critical friends and principals in low-performing schools.

Since the program is only two years old, it is difficult to measure the impact of the state's intervention. In 2003, when the state may implement sanctions, state officials will have their first chance to determine if their policies are having any effect on performance.

Finally, Connecticut has taken over four school districts since 1988:

- In 1988, the state took over the town and school district of Bridgeport due to financial problems. The state returned power to the town and school district in 1996.
- In 1992, the state took over the town and school district of West Haven due to financial difficulties. The state returned power to the town and school district in 1995.
- In 1997, due to a variety of problems within the Hartford School District, the state legislature enacted a law to abolish the locally elected school board and empower the governor to appoint a new one.
- In 2001, the state took over the town and school district of Waterbury due to financial problems.

## Kentucky

With school accountability legislation dating back to 1990, Kentucky has the longest history of state intervention into low-performing schools and school districts. Kentucky also provides a good example of a state that is reassessing and revising its accountability plan, hoping to learn from its past experiences.

In 1994, Kentucky established the School Transformation Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program in an effort to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools. Under this program, about 60 technical experts, known as distinguished educators, provide mentoring to the staffs of low-performing schools. Distinguished educators must complete a training program in preparation for providing assistance to low-performing schools. After the training program, distinguished educators spend up to two years in a school, helping to create and implement a school improvement plan with the input of the school's staff. More specifically, they facilitate change at these schools through classroom observation, careful planning, curriculum alignment and a focus on teaching and learning.

To strengthen the STAR program, Kentucky is implementing a scholastic audit program in 2002, which will determine the specific needs of each of the lowest-performing schools. As part of this program, an audit team will conduct on site visits and make recommendations toward improving student achievement at each low-performing school.

Furthermore, Kentucky revised its school accountability system to include rankings of schools. The level of assistance – or the severity of the sanction – from the state will match the level of performance at the school.

For example, the state will give additional funding and conduct a scholastic audit of low-performing “Level 3” schools, and teachers and principals in these schools will be subject to review. If members of a school's staff do not comply with or are unable to fulfill the stipulations of a recommended professional growth plan, the state may remove or transfer

them to another school. The state may also remove local school council members. If the school fails to improve after two years, students may attend a higher-performing school.

Kentucky's interventions have produced some positive results. Of the 53 schools that received technical assistance in 1994, all showed improvement, with 66% of them eligible to receive rewards for performance. According to state officials, on site visits and mentoring of staff seem to have the greatest impact on low-performing schools.

This success did not come without controversy, however. Public pressure and criticism of the state's testing system, the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), forced state leaders to modify the system. The state replaced the KIRIS with a new testing system, the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), and offered more technical assistance to low-performing schools, with an emphasis on teaching and learning.

Therefore, one important lesson to learn from Kentucky is the necessity of growth and change in state accountability systems. The ultimate goal is student achievement – if one approach fails, then others must be tried.

Finally, Kentucky has taken over five school districts since 1988:

- In 1988, state officials took over the Pike County School District due to financial problems within the district. In 1990, the state returned control to the school district. In 1998, the state board of education voted to place the school district under a declaration of financial emergency because it ended the fiscal year with a deficit budget. In 1999, the state released the school district from the declaration of emergency.
- In 1989, state officials took over the Whitley County School District and the Floyd County School District due to financial and management problems within the school districts. In 1990, the state board of education returned control to the districts. In 1997, state officials again assumed control of the Floyd County School District due to financial and management problems.

- In 1992, state officials assumed control of the Harlan County School District due to financial and management problems within the district. In 1996, state officials returned control to the district.
- In 1994, state officials assumed control of the Letcher County School District due to financial and management problems within the district. In 1997, state officials returned control to the district.

## Maryland

Maryland's Schools for Success program includes state intervention for low-performing schools. The state's intervention program attempts to change the decisionmaking processes at schools, as well as provide them with resources to support improvement.

In partnership with the state department of education, low-performing schools create school improvement teams, which help principals and staff by assisting with data analysis, creating and implementing school improvement plans and providing professional development services.

The state department of education provides school improvement leadership training to teachers, administrators and school district personnel. The training helps them set improvement goals, use data to identify performance problems and find strategies to turn the school around. The state also provides approximately \$100,000 to each low-performing school, to be spent on professional development, class-size reduction, purchase of instructional materials and other staff needs.

After each school submits an improvement plan, they must provide annual updates and demonstrate significant improvement. If they fail to improve, they face sanctions.

Since 1994, Maryland has identified 119 schools as eligible for reconstitution, though so far only four schools have been named for reconstitution and another four have closed. In 2001, the state board of education voted to take over and reconstitute three elementary schools in the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS). Subsequently, the state contracted with Edison Schools, Inc. to manage the schools. Also in 2001, the state board of education voted to reconstitute Westport Elementary/Middle School in the BCPSS. Currently, 107 schools are on the reconstitution-eligible list.

Like New York and Texas, Maryland's tough stance towards school accountability has produced some positive results. State officials believe that collaborative efforts between the state and low-performing schools have been beneficial to improving school performance in the state, and that increasing the quality of leadership in the schools has

helped to improve teaching practices and raise student achievement. From their perspective, because their approach allows the school to remain part of the school systems and the community, it keeps the pressure on a school without completely ostracizing staff and students.

In addition, they assert that the implementation of school improvement plans has gone smoothly under the guidance of school improvement teams, although the timeline for submitting school improvement plans needs refinement. Such plans are currently due on August 31 of each year, and getting the appropriate parties together over the summer is sometimes a challenge.

Finally, Maryland has taken over two school districts since 1997:

- In 1997, due to a variety of problems within the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS), the state legislature entered into a partnership with the city of Baltimore to run BCPS. From this partnership, a new, nine-member board of school commissioners was created, with members jointly appointed by the governor and the mayor.
- In 2002, the state intervened in the Prince George's County School District. The state enacted legislation that abolished the locally elected school board and created a nine-member school board appointed by the governor and the county executive.

## Massachusetts

In 1999, the Massachusetts board of education adopted a comprehensive accountability system for schools and school districts, which assesses schools and school districts to determine if they meet state standards. The state first published school performance ratings in 2000, and found four junior high schools to be underperforming. A panel reviewed and conducted a fact-finding effort in these schools, which, up to this point, have not faced any sanctions. The state will publish school performance ratings again in 2002.

To more specifically support low-performing students, the state created the academic support services program (ASSP) in 1998. The ASSP addresses the needs of students scoring in the failing and needs improvement categories on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The state also created an after-school grant program (ASGP) to support efforts to strengthen the coordination between the instruction that occurs during the school day and the activities that take place outside of the school day.

For the 2001-02 school year, the state appropriated \$40 million for ASSP and over \$5 million was provided for ASGP. School districts are using ASSP funds to extend student-learning time before and after school, on weekends and school vacations and during the summer. They are also using these funds to provide intensive, small group instruction and innovative programming. School districts report student-level data on ASSP program participation and progress. In addition, ASSP staff provides training and resources for school districts with high percentages of low-performing students and present promising program models at statewide conferences.

Massachusetts intends to implement a school and school district improvement planning process in the next two years, as well as expand services to further support low-performing students.

## New Jersey

New Jersey has received a great deal of attention for its school district accountability system, particularly for its takeovers of low-performing school districts. Seen by many as a pioneer in the realm of school district takeovers, New Jersey's efforts have produced mixed results.

In May 1988, New Jersey began proceedings to take control of the Jersey City Public Schools due to financial, management and academic problems in the school district. Despite resistance from the school district, Jersey City became the first urban school district in the nation to come under full state control in 1989. In subsequent years, the state took over the Paterson Public Schools (1991) and the Newark Public Schools (1995), and assumed management of these school districts.

Despite its aggressive approach to taking over low-performing school districts, New Jersey is still struggling to bring troubled school districts up to state standards in student achievement. For example, while conditions in Newark's elementary, middle and high schools have improved, the gains are modest compared with the rest of the state. The number of high school students who passed the reading section of the state's "High School Proficiency Test" only rose from 41.1% in 1995 to 42.3% in 1998 (more recent data is not available). The math scores for high school students were better, with 46.1% of students passing in 1998, compared with 40% in 1995. The number of 8<sup>th</sup> graders who scored in the top level of the reading portion on the state's "Early Warning Test" rose from 15.8% in the 1995-96 school year to 19.3% in the 1997-98 school year. Scores also rose from 7.6% to 11% of students on the mathematics portion during the same time period. While still far below the state average of 54% in reading and 44% in math, students in Newark are showing improvement under the intervention system. Perhaps this is why a substantial number of parents in Newark support the takeover, citing upgrades in school planning, availability of resources and an improved learning atmosphere.<sup>24</sup>



At the forefront of taking over low-performing school districts, New Jersey has experienced its share of frustration, and state officials continue to refine the intervention process in search for improved student results.

## New York

New York's Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) program, established in 1989, identifies schools that do not meet state academic performance standards. A team of educators visits and helps these schools develop an improvement plan. Such teams are comprised of administrators, curriculum specialists, experienced educators, state staffers, school board members and parents. Site visits usually last four days, during which time team members observe and assess instruction, leadership and management, professional development plans, classroom materials, disciplinary procedures and parental involvement.

Following site visits, team members decide if the school has a productive learning environment and which classroom practices need to be changed to raise student achievement. Once a plan is submitted, the school district provides assistance and support to the low-performing school. At this point, the only involvement from the state is a liaison from the state department of education who monitors the implementation of the school improvement plan. Additional funding for the school comes from the school district, not the state.

SURR schools have three years to show improvement. If a school does not make required progress towards meeting performance standards during this time, the state may revoke registration and close the school. If the state revokes a school's registration and closes the school, it must then find space at other schools for the displaced students. Another option is school reconstitution, which involves replacing up to 50% of the staff and creating a new instructional approach at a low-performing school.

According to state officials, New York has reconstituted 46 schools and closed three others since 1990. The majority of these schools are located in the New York City Public Schools, and most state interventions and sanctions have been directed at these schools.

New York's reconstitution efforts are producing a mixed picture. During the 1997-98 school year, only 16 of 86 SURR schools met all performance targets, although most SURR schools improved their performance from the prior year in their problem areas.

Finally, there were two takeovers in New York in 2002. Due to academic problems in one school district, the Roosevelt Free Union School District, the state legislature enacted a law that abolished the locally elected school board and gave the New York Board of Regents the authority to appointed a new school board. Because of management and academic problems in the other school district, the New York City Public Schools, the state legislature gave the mayor the authority to appoint a majority of school board members and the city's chancellor of public schools.

## North Carolina

Like many other states, technical assistance and increased funding to low-performing schools form the basis of North Carolina's set of state interventions. As required by state statute, schools must rewrite school improvement plans every three years as well as revise them annually as achievement data dictates. Members of site-based management teams (SBMTs), assistance teams and educational consultants who provide technical help to low-performing and at-risk schools in the state, along with individual principals, write the school improvement plans.

Before SBMTs work with a school, the state produces a needs-assessment of low-performing schools so SBMTs may better serve each school's specific needs. Assistance teams work almost exclusively with low-performing schools, while educational consultants mainly assist at-risk schools. Assistance teams remain with their assigned schools on a daily basis for one full year, while educational consultants spend only two or three days a week on site. This constant involvement provides committed human resources and continuity to school improvement efforts in the state. Specific assistance includes professional development, mentoring, classroom observation, curriculum alignment, data analysis and sharing of best practices.

Additional funding for low-performing schools comes from the governor's office and two state initiatives – Goals 2000 and NC Helps. Schools may use the extra funds for professional development and the purchase of instructional materials. Members of the SBMTs, along with principals, decide how funds will be used. Beginning in 2002, the state legislature will provide funds to a school based on the number of students performing below grade level within a school.

North Carolina has yet to place a school on probation or sanction a school, most likely due to the accountability system's relative infancy.

State officials are finding the following approaches useful in helping struggling schools improve their performance: technical assistance; concrete school improvement plans; reduction in class sizes; bonuses for teachers of math, science and exceptional children; mentoring for beginning or marginal teachers; demonstration lessons and co-teaching; classroom observations and evaluations; and differentiated professional development.

They also believe that providing high-quality training to the assistance teams and other service providers, as well as improving the knowledge and skills of school administrators and teachers, will increase the effectiveness of school improvement plans. In addition, they recommend getting buy-in from a school's staff for the school improvement plan. Perhaps most important, from their perspective, state leaders must give schools an adequate amount of time to improve. North Carolina gives a school three years to improve before it sanctions schools.

While 2003 will be the first chance for the state to truly analyze the effectiveness of their school improvement plans, some challenges are already surfacing. For example, certain schools are becoming reliant on the SBMTs, and the daily assistance they provide. When SBMTs leave after one year of service, some schools feel abandoned and at a disadvantage. Finally, staff members are occasionally reluctant to buy into the improvement process, and the extensive travel that is often required for assistance team members is sometimes a strain on the program's effectiveness.

## Rhode Island

Under the umbrella of the School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) program, Rhode Island has enacted a series of accountability reforms in the last few years. Based largely on the British Inspectorate system, in which teams of experts visit schools to observe and comment on performance, the accountability system in Rhode Island features a number of components: self-study, which analyzes school practices and problems internally; improvement plans, which lay out a reform agenda; school report night, which allows parents to have a voice in the intervention process; schools visits, in which a team of improvement experts from the state study teaching practices, school climate and organization and their impact on student learning; and, finally, a “compact for learning,” an agreement with the Rhode Island Department of Education that specifies what the state will do to support the school in question. In 1997, Rhode Island also created the Rhode Island School Investment Initiative, which requires school districts to develop strategic improvement plans and reach annual performance targets in math, reading and writing.

In addition, the state provides progressive support to underperforming schools, through examinations of school budgets, personnel and program decisions. State department of education staff meet and develop improvement plans with low-performing schools. The state also allows such schools to partner with other agencies, such as a school-reform institute at a university.

In 2002, the state released a list placing all of its schools into three categories: high-performing, moderately performing and low-performing. The list will help state officials track improvements and determine how to best deliver technical assistance.

Although Rhode Island has yet to distribute additional funds to low-performing schools or school districts, it made a budget request for \$1 million in funding for low-performing schools in 2003.

Finally, in 1991, state officials took over the Central Falls School District due to financial problems within the school district. The state continues to run this school district.

## Texas

With a school accountability system in place since 1993, Texas has long been a standard-bearer of the school accountability movement. Within this system, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) closely monitors under-performing schools and school districts and imposes sanctions as necessary.

Twenty regional education service centers (ESCs) provide technical assistance to schools and school districts. For example, if a school district receives an unacceptable rating from the state, an ESC intervenes and offers a series of recommendations directed towards improving performance. In addition, a monitoring team conducts numerous site visits and offers suggestions for corrective action. According to state officials, this intervention and monitoring process has worked so well that the need for other types of interventions has proven unnecessary.

Beyond the intervention and monitoring process, the TEA and the ESCs work together to ensure that all students are offered a quality education through the creation and implementation of school district improvement plans, which must provide clear evidence of increased planning that addresses deficiencies in assessment, as well as concrete strategies designed to improve student and school performance. Texas does not offer any additional funding to low-performing schools and school districts.

Schools and school districts that do not meet state standards are subject to local hearings regarding the reasons for poor performance. On site peer reviews are also conducted, and, once findings are released, a school or school district is subject to sanctions. The state increases the severity of the sanctions for schools and school districts that consistently perform at low levels, including reconstitutions, closures and takeovers of schools, and takeovers of school districts.

Texas's approach has yielded some positive results. The motivation to improve or risk further sanctions has caused student scores on the Texas Assessment and Academic Skills



(TAAS) exam to rise each year. Critics contend that such increases are a result of teaching to the test at the expense of critical thinking skills, but the state's intervention system appears to have contributed to increased student results.

According to state officials, the following approaches have been helpful in improving performance: classroom visits, including teacher interviews, review of student products and classroom observations; data analysis worksheets that ensure school districts are tracking low-performing students; parental input and involvement; and flexibility in the monitoring system. According to state officials, using a fact-finding approach in the state's intervention system – studying the causes of a particular school's problem – has also proven effective in Texas, with recommendations being built from facts that may be reviewed and tracked by each school district or school.

From these officials' perspective, a state's accountability system needs clear expectations, as well as consequences for failing to meet those expectations. Texas believes in the high-stakes approach and encourages other states to follow their lead. According to these officials, state leaders need to be tough, but also encouraging.

Finally, Texas has taken over and managed two school districts since 1995:

- In 1995, state officials appointed a management team to run the Somerset Independent School District due to problems with financial and student performance. In 1997, state officials returned control to the district.
- In 1996, state officials appointed a management team to run the Wilmer-Hutchins Independent School District due to problems with financial and student performance. In 1998, state officials returned control to the district.

## West Virginia

While West Virginia has established a fairly comprehensive set of state interventions, it has relatively extensive experience with school district takeovers. Since 1992, it has taken over four school districts:

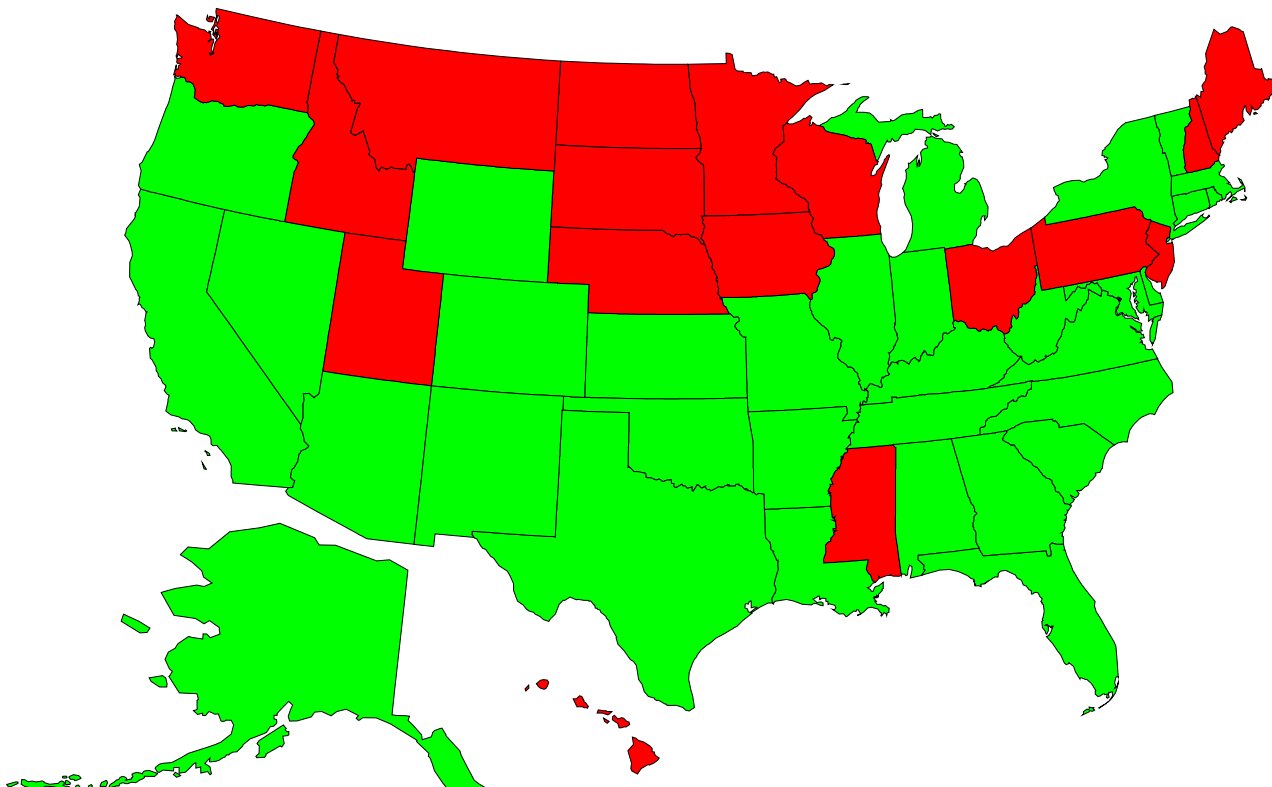
- In 1992, state officials took over the Logan County Schools, after many years of poor management and personnel practices and low student achievement results within the school district. In 1996, state officials returned control to the school district.
- In 1998, state officials took over the Mingo County Schools after determining that "extraordinary circumstances" existed in the school district, such as continuing budget deficits, low student achievement and a lack of leadership.
- In 2000, state officials took over the Lincoln County Schools due to a number of problems in the school district involving management, financing, facilities and academics.
- In 2001, state officials took over the McDowell County Schools based on an audit report that indicated the county was failing to provide a high-quality education for students, and that unhealthy and unsafe conditions existed in many schools that placed employees and students in danger.

What is unique about West Virginia's takeovers, though, is that the state keeps high-level administrators and the locally elected school board members in place, but reduces their powers, largely so these individuals know what to do when the school district regains control of its operations. School district officials advise state-appointed decisionmakers on fiscal and budgetary matters, but still make curricular and instructional decisions.

The state's first takeover, which involved the Logan County Public Schools, is widely considered a success for increasing test scores, improving management and strengthened local support of the school district. In 1996, after managing the school district for four

years, the state returned control of the school district to local officials. The state remains in control of the other three districts that it has taken over, though.

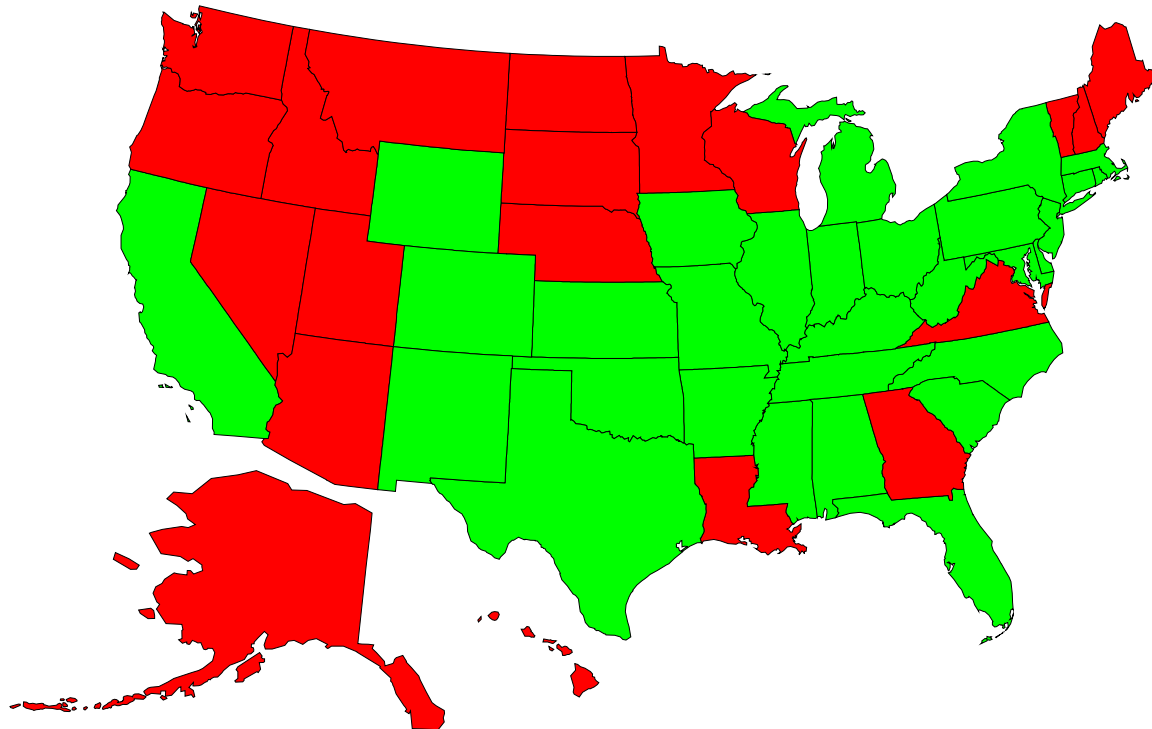
# INTERVENTION POLICIES




STATES WITH POLICIES FOR INTERVENTIONS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS


no (17)  
yes (33)



# INTERVENTION POLICIES



STATES WITH POLICIES FOR INTERVENTIONS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

 no (20)

 yes (30)

 no (20)  
 yes (30)

## Endnotes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Diane Massell, *State Strategies for Building Local Capacity: Addressing the Needs of Standards-based Reform* (Policy Briefs No. RB-25). (Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1998).
- <sup>2</sup> Zena Rudo, *Corrective action in low-performing schools and school districts*. (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001).
- <sup>3</sup> Massell.
- <sup>4</sup> David Mandel, *Transforming Underperforming Schools: A Strategy for Tennessee*. (Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Regional Education Board, 2000), p. 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Julian Betts and Anne Danenberg, *School Accountability California Style: An Analysis of Recent Trends in Achievement, School Resources, and Intervention* [report online] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2002, accessed 2 July 2002); available from <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/TACConfPapers.htm>; Internet.
- <sup>6</sup> Mike Schmoker, "The Real Causes of Higher Achievement," in *SEDLetter: Within Our Reach: Higher Student Achievement* XIV, no. 2 (2001), p. 6.
- <sup>7</sup> Todd Ziebarth. *State Takeovers and Reconstitutions*. [report online] (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2002, accessed 13 August 2002); available from ECS: <http://www.ecs.org/>; Internet.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *Turning around low-performing schools: A guide for state and local leaders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), p. 46.
- <sup>9</sup> Sarah Brooks, *The Strong Schools Model of Standards-based Reform*. (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, 2000), p. 20.
- <sup>10</sup> Kenneth K. Wong and Francis X. Shen (2001). *Does School District Takeover Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of City and State Takeover as a School Reform Strategy*. (Paper prepared for delivery at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA).
- <sup>11</sup> Kenneth K Wong, Robert Dreeben, Laurence E. Lynn, Jr., and Gail L. Sunderman, *Integrated Governance As A Reform Strategy in The Chicago Public Schools*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, January 1997) and Kenneth K. Wong, *Transforming Urban School Systems: Integrated Governance in Chicago and Birmingham (UK)*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, May 1998).
- <sup>12</sup> Anthony S. Bryk, Yeow Meng Thum, John Q. Easton and Stuart Luppescu, *Academic Productivity of Chicago Public Elementary Schools*. (Chicago, IL: The Consortium on Chicago School Research, March 1998).
- <sup>13</sup> Programs for Educational Opportunity (1995). *Equity, Excellence and School Reform: A New Paradigm for Desegregation*. Ann Arbor: Programs for Educational Opportunity, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education.
- <sup>14</sup> Henig, Jeffery R. (1996). "The Local Dynamics of Choice: Ethnic Preferences and Institutional Responses." In Bruce Fuller and Richard F. Elmore (Eds.), *Who Chooses? Who Loses: Culture, Institutions and the Unequal Affects of School Choice*. pp. 95-117. New York, New York: Teachers College Press.
- <sup>15</sup> Peter Cookson and Sonali Shroff (1997). *School Choice and Urban School Reform*. ERIC Clearinghouse of Urban Education.
- <sup>16</sup> Margaret A. Eisenhart and Kenneth R. Howe, *A Study of Boulder Valley School District's Open Enrollment System* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 2000).
- <sup>17</sup> Cookson and Sonali.
- <sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education (2000). *The State of Charter Schools: Fourth Year Report*. Washington D.C.
- <sup>19</sup> Rudo.
- <sup>20</sup> Margaret Goertz, Robert Floden, and Jennifer O'Day, *Studies of education reform: Systemic reform. Volume I: Findings and conclusions*. (Rutgers, NJ: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1995).
- <sup>21</sup> Brooks, 39.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 79.
- <sup>23</sup> Julian Betts and Anne Danenberg, *School Accountability California Style: An Analysis of Recent Trends in Achievement, School Resources, and Intervention* [report online] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2002, accessed 2 July 2002); available from <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/TACConfPapers.htm>; Internet.
- <sup>24</sup> Community Training and Assistance Center, *Myths and Realities: The Impact of the State Takeover on Students and Schools in Newark* (Boston: Community Training and Assistance Center, 2000) 4.